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SUBJECT: TRADITIONAL MUSLIM LEADER SALUTES PEACE CORPS, US POLICY

¶1. (U) Summary: The image of the USG among Muslims in the Mokolo Division of Cameroon's Extreme North Province is largely positive, thanks to the work of Peace Corps volunteers, US Embassy outspokenness on democracy and anti-corruption, and small-grant development efforts, according to Yacouba Mohamadou Mourtalla, the Lamido (traditional leader) of Mokolo. Yacouba nonetheless recommended that the USG reach out to members of the community to initiate discussion on subjects like Islam in the United States and controversial USG policies in order to dispel misperceptions of the USG as an anti-Islamic crusader. End summary.

¶2. (U) Yacouba Mohamadou Mourtalla is the Lamido--a hereditary leadership role similar to a chief--of Mokolo, a region with more than 50,000 inhabitants along the border with Nigeria in Cameroon's Extreme North Province. Responding to questions from Poloff in a September 29 conversation in his Mokolo offices, Yacouba explained that the image of the USG in his region is largely positive for three reasons:

--Peace Corps volunteers in the region have had a meaningful impact--especially in the health sector--on the population's quality of life, and the volunteers' willingness to live among their host populations instills trust and friendship within the community.

--US leadership in pushing the Government of Cameroon for progress on reforms for democratization and anti-corruption is appreciated by the community, which shares the USG's concerns about the imperative for greater government accountability.

--US development programs--specifically a small grants program funded by the US Department of Agriculture's Food for Progress program--have had a meaningful impact in improving the standard of living for many within the community who suffer most from the lack of credit and financial facilities.

¶3. (U) Despite the strength of these positive examples, Yacouba explained, there is still a need to dispel the perception that the U.S. is anti-Islam. When Poloff described the richness and strength of the American Muslim community, Yacouba suggested that the Embassy seek to share this information with a broader audience in his community and across the region.

¶4. (U) Comment: Yacouba's benevolent characterization of the USG is evidence that good policies and programs, well-implemented, can cultivate a positive relationship with communities that might otherwise be susceptible to anti-American sentiment. As Yacouba suggested, however, there is still more to be done to dispel false impressions of the U.S. agenda and we plan to engage the region more

actively in the coming months.

Nelson